

Castillo de San Felipe del Morro: Lighthouse  
(Puerto San Juan Light)  
(Faro del Castillo del Morro)  
Summit of Castillo de San Felipe del Morro  
San Juan Antiguo (barrio)  
Municipality of San Juan  
Puerto Rico

HAER No. PR-23

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PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

## HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Castillo de San Felipe del Morro:Lighthouse  
(Puerto San Juan Light)  
(Faro del Castillo del Morro)

PR-23

Location: On Summit San Felipe del Morro Castle, San Juan  
Historic District, Port San Juan, Puerto Rico  
Position: 18° 28.4 N - 66° 07 4' W

Date of Erection: 1908 rebuilding  
original lighthouse 1848

Present Owner: U.S. Department of Commerce  
U.S. Coast Guard

Original Owner: Central Lighthouse Commission  
Colonial Public Works Office  
Harbor and Port Section  
Government of Spain

Present Use: Lighthouse

Significance: The first Puerto San Juan Lighthouse was built in  
1846 at location 18° 20' N - 59° 48' 50" W,  
187 feet above water. The light was formed by  
five parabolic reflectors. The structure  
deteriorated so badly that a new location was  
chosen by mid 1860's. The new installation was  
built at its present location in 1876 as a 3rd  
order light. It had an exposed brick octagonal  
base which supported an octagonal tower  
(cast-iron) painted gray and white. The lantern  
was also octagonal crowned with a copper cupola.  
The original lenticular lens was built apparently  
by Lemmonier Y Cie. The earliest known  
characteristic was a fixed white light, with  
eclipses in 1' in 1'. It had no dwelling  
although it was serviced by three keepers.

During the course of the Spanish American War and  
the San Juan bombardment by Admiral Simpson, the  
cast-iron lantern and tower were destroyed. In  
1899 the Navy Department rebuilt the tower as an  
octagonal reinforced concrete structure with a  
new lenticular lens. By 1905-1906 a crack,  
through and around the top of the tower directly  
under the lantern, caused its demolition. In  
1908 it was rebuilt as a three-story square brick  
and masonry tower, with a cast-iron helical bar  
lantern. It was built around the old Spanish  
brick octagonal base. The new tower was painted  
gray.

Part of the old brick work was retained on the first floor which today encloses a vestibule, oil room, and a closet. On the second floor --the square tower-- are found the watchroom, a small alcove, and a small hall. The third floor was actually part of the lantern and lens room. The lantern was of cast-iron and bronze with wrought-iron roofing plates. It had a surrounding cemented gallery enclosed by a parapet. On each corner of the parapet small ornamental Spanish style guard houses were built. The new tower showed new wooden windows and doors following a pseudo-Spanish style.

In 1919 the illuminating apparatus was a 3rd order, lenticular, 1875 French Sautter, Lemonnier & Cie lens installed in 1908. The central drum measured 1m. and had 8 flashing panels, each made up of 6 ring elements and one bull's eye. It did not have prisms above or below the central drum. The apparatus revolved on a chariot activated by a clock-work system. The clock cord descended through the center column of the tower cast-iron winding stairway. The cord had a 200 lb. weight. The rotating machinery was protected by a cylindrical cast-iron and glass case. The iron pedestal was set on a concrete base.

In 1932 the original weight driven rotating apparatus was replaced by an electrical driven mechanism. By 1937 the structure's color was changed from gray to cream with brown trimmings. In 1962 the light was automated and the resident personnel discontinued.

The actual light is the same 1908 square brick tower with an octagonal brick base with the 1937 paint characteristics. It shows the same 1875 French lenticular lens.

Puerto San Juan is the oldest lighthouse still in existence and use in the Island. It was built to guide the entrance into San Juan Bay and Harbor, one of the most important trading centers of the Spanish Empire since the early 16th century. By the late 1880's and early 1890's it became the central lighthouse of the group formed by Cabo San Juan and Arecibo lights, thus lighting the central northern shore section of the Island.

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